

**REMARKS**

These Remarks are in reply to the Office Action mailed November 18, 2004.

Claims 1-30 were pending in the Application prior to the outstanding Office Action, with claims 1, 9, 13, 17 and 24 being independent. No claims are being presently canceled or added. Claims 17 and 21 are being amended. Claims 1-30 remain for the Examiner's consideration.

Claims 1-30 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as allegedly being unpatentable over U.S. Patent No. 6,549,936 to Hirabayashi (hereafter referred to simply as "Hirabayashi") in view of newly cited U.S. Patent No. 6,711,616 to Stamm et al. (hereafter referred to simply as "Stamm").

The filing date of the present application is December 19, 2000. The effective prior art date of Stamm under 35 U.S.C. 102(d) is May 1, 2000.

Applicants are submitting herewith a Declaration under 37 C.F.R. 1.131, that shows actual reduction to practice of the claimed invention prior to the effective date of Stamm. As explained in MPEP 715, this Declaration should be sufficient to swear behind the Stamm reference, and thus overcome the 35 U.S.C. 103(a), by removing the Stamm reference as a prior art reference.

Accordingly, Applicants respectfully request that the Declaration be considered, and that the 35 U.S.C. 103(a) rejection be withdrawn. The Examiner is respectfully requested to telephone the undersigned if he can assist in any way with regards to the Declaration.

In light of the above, it is respectfully submitted that all of the claims now pending in the subject patent application should be allowable, and a Notice of Allowance is requested. The Examiner is respectfully requested to telephone the undersigned if he can assist in any way in expediting issuance of a patent.

The Commissioner is authorized to charge any underpayment or credit any overpayment to Deposit Account No. 24-0037 for any matter in connection with this response, including any fee for extension of time, which may be required.

Respectfully submitted,

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